



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



Fra Angelico, 1437-1446
Martha and Mary in the garden of Gethsemane



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.
Accept my memory,
my understanding,
And my entire will.
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.
I return it to you,
that it may be governed by your will.
Give me only your grace
and the gift of loving you,
And I will be rich enough;
I will ask for nothing more.
Amen.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy continues to invite us to take up our cross and follow Jesus.
- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.
- ▶ Today's liturgy is a reflection on hospitality and Christian service. The Martha story is not a condemnation of the service she offered, but a reminder that even with our best intentions to serve, we must keep things in balance and in perspective.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Genesis 18:1-10

- ▶ Parishes today place great importance on providing hospitality to God's people. This is not just a nice thing to do; it is a Biblical imperative. Today's first reading and Gospel illustrate the importance God places on hospitality. Hospitality is understood in this reading as the manifestation of God.
- ▶ The author of today's verses in Genesis gives us a glimpse into the humanity of Abraham.
- ▶ The laws that governed hospitality in ancient cultures were not merely ethical mores or suggestions—they were commands. Not to offer hospitality was a grievous offense.
- ▶ Hospitality offered at the family table resulted in an unbreakable covenant between the parties who broke bread together.
- ▶ Judging by the amount of beef and bread presented by Sarah and Abraham, it is apparent that the hospitality they offered was extravagant.
- ▶ The author of this story was well aware of secular cultural epics of the day. Gods visited the heroes of those epics and awarded them with gifts. The gifts were commensurate with the lavishness of hospitality extended by the hero.
- ▶ In this epic, God awarded Abraham with the surprised announcement that he and Sarah would have a child in spite of Sarah's old age.
- ▶ Since Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children this birth was considered miraculous or supernatural and was later understood as prefiguring Jesus' future birth to Mary.
- ▶ The story of God's visit to Abraham communicates God's divine purpose—to be in intimate relationship with his people. God came in the flesh to visit Abraham as he would do again one day in the future when he sent his Son. This event prefigures the Incarnation of Christ.
- ▶ God's preposterous promise to Abraham notwithstanding, Abraham trusted God's word. Sarah laughed and Abraham trusted.

- ▶ Abraham and Sarah are icons of faith-filled, joy-filled servants of the Lord—icons for all believers.
- ▶ Three people were in the entourage that visited Abraham, but only one interacted with Abraham and Sarah. Future Christians would have no difficulty understanding this story in light of a Christian theology of Trinity.
- ▶ This reading is not a catechism on hospitality, it is rather an example of God's desire to be an active participants in human history, in the history of salvation.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ Have you ever been a recipient of hospitality that had a lasting impression on you? What did it mean to you and why was it a special event for you? What made you remember it? What feelings does the memory evoke in you? What did the experience teach you?
- ▶ Why was hospitality so important to the ancient peoples?
- ▶ Why is hospitality important to us today?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God's relationship with us?
- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

Second Reading: Colossians 1:24-28

- ▶ The letter to the Colossians makes us privy to a one-sided conversation. We do not know what the problem or issue at hand was, we only know what answer was given to the issue. Paul defended his mission throughout the letter.
- ▶ Paul was concerned about the aberrant philosophies that were creeping into the community and watering down the Gospel.
- ▶ Paul preached the cross; he preached Jesus Christ crucified and risen as the only Gospel that offered salvation to everyone.
- ▶ His letter was written from a jail cell, yet he joyfully endured his suffering. Paul understood his own suffering as suffering for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ Paul's letter serves as a catechism for Christian discipleship for all believers. Baptized Christians are called to enter into the Paschal Mystery—to embrace the cross of joy, the cross of victory and the cross of struggle for the sake of the gospel.
- ▶ One cannot be a disciple unless one is willing to take up the cross and follow Christ all the way to Calvary and beyond.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way do you presently take up your cross and follow Jesus? What does that mean to you today in our culture?
- ▶ What new way of thinking, or belief system, or theology gets in the way or has the potential to get in the way of your relationship with Christ?
- ▶ How is this Good News for us today?

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Jesus visits Mary and Martha. Mary attends to Jesus and Martha is busy about the business of hospitality.
- ▶ The most traditional interpretation of the Martha and Mary sequence affirms that it is a story of the contrast between contemplation and action.
- ▶ There is, however, a different, less traditional perspective worthy of consideration.
- ▶ The Martha in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John are so different it is difficult to imagine that they are the same person.
- ▶ John’s Martha is a leader of the Johannine community. Martha, not Mary, went out to meet Jesus after Lazarus’ death. Like the beloved disciple she was also called “beloved.” Martha entered into theological, eschatological dialogue with Jesus who referred to himself as the Resurrection and the Life. Martha was epitomized as a model disciple. Martha’s love of Christ leads to service.
- ▶ Martha professed Christ as Messiah. (Peter has that distinction in the Synoptics.) John’s Gospel highlights the elevated positions of leadership enjoyed by strong women of faith.
- ▶ Interpreters have tried to apologize for Jesus’ treatment of Martha in this Gospel because it was believed that women held an exalted and thus equal status in the Lukan community. They have tried to tell what Jesus “really” meant rather than what is actually stated.

- ▶ Hearing God's word and doing God's word are held up as two opposites.
- ▶ Commentators have told us that what Jesus was trying to say is that Martha was way too concerned over worldly things and not enough concerned over spiritual things.
- ▶ Scripture tells a different story if one would look deep within the text. First, as we discussed in the first reading, hospitality was an extremely important biblical principle—akin to offering the manifestation of God himself. No one dare take the commands and responsibilities of hospitality lightly.
- ▶ The word *diakoinia* in verse 40 has been interpreted to mean “details of hospitality”. The word had other meanings as well—it was a reference for various forms of ministry.
- ▶ There is strong evidence that this story reflected the tension in the community over the roles of women. Even though women were involved in many ministerial activities such as preaching, leadership and acts of service, there are echoes of dissatisfaction with that reality.
- ▶ Pauline letters attest to the suggestion that women should be silenced. Perhaps the reality here is that Luke has Jesus affirming that proposition. Some have suggested that perhaps Jesus was telling Martha not to get involved in official ministry, but to be silent like Mary; be satisfied with the role of prayer and contemplation.
- ▶ Perhaps Martha's concern is “not about having too much work to do, but rather that she is being denied her role in ministerial service”¹.
- ▶ Perhaps Luke's perspective is that women should be silent; concentrate on prayer and simply be obedient and receptive. Such is the “better part” they should choose.
- ▶ One cannot simply ignore the reality of the cultural milieu of this gospel—that it takes place in the midst of an extremely patriarchal society. Luke would have been influenced by the cultural norms and mores of his day. While Scripture indeed is the inspired word of God, it is also culturally conditioned and influenced by the culture and society from which it was borne.
- ▶ One way to meditate on this Gospel is to see the strong, authoritative Martha as she was portrayed in John's Gospel. The artist Fra Angelico (see first page) portrayed such an image. Mary and Martha join Jesus in his Gethsemane ordeal while the disciples slept.
- ▶ The bottom line of this story is that no matter what was going on in the community—whether we choose John's perspective over Luke's perspective—the truth remains. We are all called to abandon all else and focus our entire being on the living Christ in our midst. We are called to follow the great commandment of love—we are to love God with our entire mind, heart and being and the extension of that love is to love and serve others.
- ▶ Service must flow from such love, if not, it is hollow and self-serving.

¹Reed, Barbara, *Women in the Gospel of Luke*, (Collegeville, MN. The Liturgical Press, 1996). 157.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ One interpretation of this Gospel is that it portrays the tension of the community over the ministerial role of women in the community. How does it feel that communities of Jesus' day and communities today struggle with the same cultural issues yet there are two thousand years of difference between them?
- ▶ What do you think is more important—prayer or contemplation? What does this Gospel teach us about that question?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the role of people in our community who traditionally do not have such roles—people who have broken out of expected and/or traditional patterns of leadership?
- ▶ What is the bottom line of this Gospel? What are the implications?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about what it means to live in the kingdom of God?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. I was shown amazing hospitality by the director of student affairs and the campus police at St. John's University in Collegeville the summer I completed my masters degree in theology. I was preparing for comprehensive exams. The stress was palpable on an ordinary day. My son, who had been on one of his national "walk-about" during one of his psychotic episodes, appeared on campus.

Most people and most institutions would have had him expelled from the campus. Not St. John's. God's own hospitality was extended to me and to him. Rather than tell me it was my problem and I simply had to get him off of the campus, they let him stay for a few days and took a personal, active role in helping me get him hospitalized. I was then given an extension to finish my comprehensive exams.

I have never before felt God's powerful hand in the person of God's faithful servants as I did that week. The school personnel and the college itself are truly committed to practicing what the Gospel preaches. They saw beyond what was apparent—the homeless, frightening looking young man-- to a child of God in need of God's own care, compassion and hospitality.

I understand from personal experience what the ancient community understood—the extension of hospitality to another human being, is an extension of God's presence to that person. It is pure gift.

#2. A man I knew in a previous parish continuously argued with anyone who would listen to him. He was hate-filled and fearful of homosexuals. He was angry with the Catholic Church for not being more forceful in its condemnation of them. He wanted the Church to proclaim them damned in the eyes of God. He was angry over the Church's position that homosexual acts are sinful but the gay person in and of himself or herself is loved by God and is to be loved by others. Yes, gay persons are to avoid sinful homosexual activity. They are not, however, to be hated. This man wanted the Lord's vengeance to cast its fire upon the entire homosexual community. He was toxic!

He was an example to all of us of a belief system, teaching or philosophy taken to an extreme—a philosophy that was distracting to a relationship with the living God. This man was so focused on the "SIN" of homosexuality—he was so intent on the sin of others—that it got in the way of his relationship with God. All he could spew was hatred. He professed faith in a loving, merciful, compassionate God and then urged that same God to condemn, damn and hate one of God's own children. The man became so angry that he left the Catholic Church to search for a church family with similar beliefs as his own.

Paul was right on the mark—if we keep our focus on Jesus Christ crucified and risen—if we take up our cross each and every day—if we focus our attention on God and God alone, the rest will take care of itself. Philosophies, even if they have some truth, or seem to be rooted in righteousness can become the object of one's focus and undue attention.

They can become distracting and idolatrous. Paul insists that we must keep our eyes focused on Jesus and the means of our salvation—the cross of Jesus Christ.

#3. I am touched by the interpretation of Scripture scholar, Barbara Reed, concerning this Gospel—that the Gospel gives us the bird’s eye view into tension in the Lukan community over the role of women in the community.

I am further touched by role of women portrayed as strong leaders in the community in the Gospel of John. I prefer John’s portrait over Luke’s. That is not to say that I am standing on a soap box to make a plea for women’s ordination. I will leave that issue for others to debate since there is nothing I can add to the argument nor is there a thing I can do about it. It is a moot point.

I once had a priest call me and tell me that he was being interviewed by a national paper. He asked how women today felt about their inability to serve and minister in the Church. He asked me how I felt about that issue. I told him that I did not agree with his premise. I would never say that I cannot minister or serve in the Church today. I believe, in fact, that the converse is true. I minister, serve and lead people to Christ each and every day. My role in today’s church is to be the best minister I can be. I prefer to focus on what I can do and what I am called to do rather than on what I cannot do. The latter is an exercise in futility. The former is proactive and helps me keep my focus on Christ and his mandate that I build the kingdom of God on earth. Such is the focus of this Gospel. It asks me to stay focused on Christ and his saving mission.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Morality
Moral Decision Making
Prayer
Catholic Social Teaching

Kingdom of God
Jesus Christ
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

LITURGICAL YEAR

In one complete liturgical year the entire life and mission of Christ is unfolded and manifested in the liturgy. Today would be a good time for us to review the importance of the liturgical year and the stories that unfold for us throughout that year that help us integrate what Jesus taught us about establishing his kingdom on earth. The focus of today's extended session will be the LITURGICAL YEAR.

MORALITY

Today's liturgy focuses on what it means to live as faithful disciples. As such, it is a most appropriate time to consider what the Church means when it speaks of morality—that is refers to a just way of living and being in the world. Thus, today the focus of our extended session will be MORALITY.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Today's liturgy focuses on the right way of living in the kingdom of God. In order to establish the reign of God and live according to the moral imperatives of the Gospel, we must learn what it means to make a moral decision—that it is based on the teaching of Christ and the Scriptures. Thus, today would be a most appropriate time to focus our attention in the extended session on MORAL

PRAYER

Mary and Martha illustrate for us the tension between prayer and action. Today's extended session will focus on the role of PRAYER in the life of the disciple.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

To offer the biblical imperative of offering God's own hospitality is to govern one's life according to moral norms, especially those found in Catholic Social Teaching. The focus of our extended doctrinal session will be CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus came to establish the kingdom. Today he continues to teach his disciples what it means to be a disciple in that kingdom. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

JESUS CHRIST

The focus of this evangelistic effort is Jesus Christ and his mission to the world. Each Sunday would be an appropriate time to reflect on Jesus the Christ. Thus, today our extended session will be on JESUS CHRIST.

EUCCHARIST SERIES

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.